

TRANSITIONS & TOOLKITS
exploring blended learning and
student engagement

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Project Team

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Project Background

Help or Hindrance – Blended Approaches & Learner Engagement

Aim: to identify effective student learning strategies in a blended environment

Funded: Through the 2010 national project fund of Ako Aotearoa, NZ's National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz

Project Outcomes:

- Strategies tested in four organisations
- Case studies for each participating institution
- Briefing papers relevant to each institution and the wider sector.



Project Focus

- Identify student learning strategies in a blended environment
- Identify factors that enhance student and staff engagement in a blended context
- Develop strategies enabling teachers and institutions to give pedagogical support to enhance learner engagement and achievement
- Develop and test a toolkit of engagement strategies
- Refine the toolkit to facilitate student engagement (and re-engagement)
- Describe engagement strategies in terms of teacher intention and student response

Key Project Outcome

Develop a toolkit to facilitate student engagement through effective blended approaches to teaching and learning.

It is intended that the toolkit will include strategies that:

- minimise barriers to engagement in a blended context
- enhance quality of engaged experience in a blended context
- support the engagement/re-engagement of students in a blended context who have either
 - never engaged, or
 - have become disengaged.

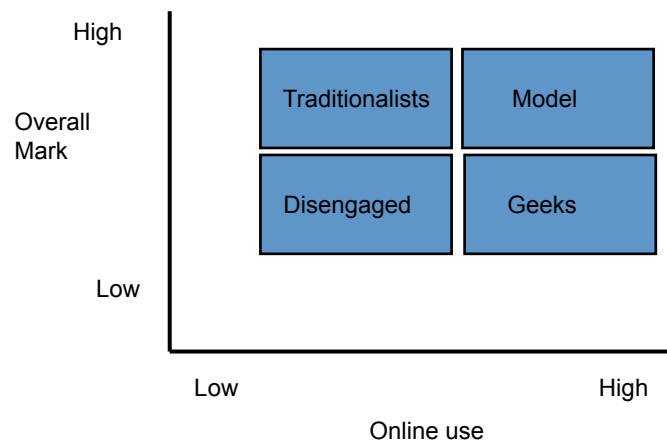
Underlying premise

“the promises (and hopefully, the benefits) of blended learning are extensive”

– Bonk, Kim, & Zeng (2009)

So, what do we mean by “blended learning”?

Model of learner engagement



Maltby and Mackie, 2009

Defining blended learning?

“At its simplest, blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to face learning experiences with on-line experiences.”

Garrison and Kanuka (2004)

BUT...

- Blended learning is becoming an almost ubiquitous notion... So, what do we understand by the term “blended learning?”

A moment to reflect...

- *What is your understanding of the term ‘blended learning’?*

Some ways of defining blended learning...

- *In the cybercampus, students never meet ...it is completely asynchronous. ...courses are of a blended modality – Fulkerth (2010)*
- *Blended learning describes learning activities that involve a systematic combination of co-present (face-to-face) interactions and technologically-mediated interactions between students, teachers and learning resources – Harris, Connolly and Feeney (2009)*
- *...where course content and participant interaction is conducted at least partially online... – Arbaugh et al (2009)*
- *...blended learning environments combine face-to-face instruction with technology-mediated instruction – Graham (2006)*
- *At its simplest, blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences – Garrison and Kanuka (2004)*
- *A combination of face-to-face and online learning – Williams (2002)*
- *An opportunity to redesign the way courses are developed, scheduled, and delivered in higher education through a combination of physical and virtual instruction – Bleed (2001)*

What do we mean by “blended learning”?

Our team’s initial working (and evolving) definition of blended learning separates *the intentionality of teaching from the impact of that intentionality on the learners.*

In this approach, we are exploring ideas and practices around “blended teaching” and “blended learning.”

We still have some work to do around this, but at this stage ...

Blended teaching is a formal adoption of a range of teaching strategies involving pedagogy and technology aimed at developing intended learning outcomes in students. It is generally conducted by and controlled in institutions and characterized by approved methods using agreed technologies. Those engaged in blended teaching may have received instruction or help to develop their teaching strategies.

Blended learning is a purposive but usually informal activity undertaken by a student who engages a range of learning techniques and strategies aimed at acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes of relevance to them. Some of the learning may be formal and some informal. The learning strategies may be influenced by teaching approaches but are not determined by them, nor are the learning strategies under the control of an institution.

Our Project Challenge

To develop approaches which better align the actions and intentions of the teachers and their institutions to the expectations, activities, actions, contexts, skills and outcomes of the learners *in the blended environment*.

Process

- Focussing on second year business courses (looking for a degree of homogeneity with cohorts for analyses)
- Inviting\$ teachers interested in blended learning to participate
- Seeking to understand teachers' engagement strategies through a series of personal interviews
- Surveying student perceptions and understandings re: blended learning through online questionnaires and focus group interviews
- Measuring student engagement, perseverance, outcomes and success
- Developing a Toolkit of resources
- Comparing teachers' intentions with student perceptions in the analytical phase

A connected challenge

Developing a shared understanding among staff and engaging them in the implementing a “blended approach”:

- The project is looking to contribute to such a shared understanding and then to make available a “blended learning toolkit” for staff to use.
- The project is also looking to embed the need and support for a Toolkit within institutional practice.

What is this Toolkit?

The Toolkit is for teachers

- to minimise barriers to engagement, enhance quality, and enthuse the disengaged
- will have both institutional and individual applications

Toolkit Components

- 1) Needs Assessment – Course characteristics, Nature of content, learner characteristics
- 2) Course Planning Tools – Based on input from Needs Assessment and provide a planning rubric
- 3) Developmental Tools – Designing content, communication & interaction strategies, student support, reflective activities, and diagnostic & formative activities
- 4) Evaluation and Reflective tools (for teachers)

Some individual tools supported by institutions...

- “Traditional tools” (Fulkerth, 2010);
 - *Email*
 - *The web*
 - *Podcasts*
 - *Powerpoint*
 - *Web-conferencing*
 - *Social networking etc*
- And...

Some institutional “tools” at an organisational level

- Release time for training
- Technology mentors
- Supplemental pay and awards
- Access to real-time support staff
- Faculty input into software selection
- User-based technology assessment techniques
- Departmental forums and support
- Professional development programmes and staff

Georgina and Olson (2008)

There are also pedagogical tools at an institutional level

- Course design templates
- Lesson plans (Littlejohn & Pegler, 2007)
- Reusable objects (McAndrew, 2005)
- Frameworks (Garrison & Vaughn, 2008)
- Rubrics
- Checklists
- ...

Tools for measuring and enhancing student engagement and support

Measuring engagement through:

- Usage of online learning tools (VLE analytics)
- Assessment (formative and summative)
- Student perceptions (survey and interviews)

Also:

Engagement strategies →

Engagement Strategies

1. **Curiosity** – make learners feel a part of the class *and* the discipline
2. **Removing technical obstacles** – using checklists and help desks
3. **Address student obstacles** – e.g., procrastination, time management, anxiety...
4. **Social presence** – teacher immediacy through visible and useful teacher participation, accessibility, options for social networking
5. **Feedback** – teacher, transparent processes, timely student feedback, advice, help, self-monitoring tools...
6. **Learning Activities** – online quizzes, problem solving, case studies...
7. **Content** – tools for designing lessons, structuring courses, rules/guidance for writing prompts and feedback...
8. **Personal contact** – strategies for monitoring and early checks for engagement
9. **Support** – Direct student to other support staff, contact information...
10. **Negotiated study** – allowances to help students get “back on board”

And in more detail...

- a blended learning course review rubric E.G. developing a VLE site based on an approach used by Lincoln University (NZ)...
- adaption of processes and guidelines into checklist and rubric forms

Blended Learning draft “Course Review Rubric”

Site Content	Baseline	Effective	Exemplary
12	Welcome letter containing a brief introduction to the course and its content	Short video of a member of the teaching staff introducing him/herself and the course	Series of videos containing updates, important points, links to real world events etc.
13	Course outline (LU minimum content) in approved LU format	Course content displayed as a course map	Links from assessments to relevant sections in course outline
14	Topics have descriptive headings reflected in menu block . Course content structured as modules with topics within (not weeks)	Consistent use of module and topic headings through the site and are linked via the course map	
15	Learning objectives at module and topic levels	Explanation of how each topic contributes to the acquisition of Graduate Profile attributes	Explanation of how each topic's learning objectives and Graduate Profile attributes contribute to career

Checklists – where?

- Flight (from airplanes through rockets) #1
- Medicine (especially surgery) #2
- Nuclear plant operations (and ICBM launches)
- Mechanical engineering & structural design
- Computer project design (mixed success)
- Used in both “high” and “low” stakes settings

But they should **not** be used in higher ed... →

Checklists – why?

- aid memory – and enhancing its application
- make the minimum, required steps in complex situations clear and explicit

Essentially, this is an issue involving **cognitive load**. Just as students make mistakes when challenged by courses that require them to integrate new skills and knowledge with their pre-existing base, so are staff teaching in blended and online environments pressed.

checklists – when?

- particularly in course planning & design
- also useful in ongoing activities of course
- assessment rubrics may be considered an enhanced form
- work best in situations that can change the dynamics and motivations for cooperation and collaboration (form an altered culture)
- need to foster internalizing desired behaviors
- work best when those using them have helped to create them

Checklists – when *not*?

If the process is good enough for pilots, surgeons and high-tech construction, why not in higher ed? (*Who gets more practice – the surgeon or the professor?*)

- But – checklists are used in baggage handling as well as on the flight deck...
- They can also foster complacency (oh, I've done that before...) and work to minimize but don't prevent mistakes
- Are they created locally or imposed externally?
- Are the benefits clearly visible?
- Are the benefits documentable? via what data?

Checklists – examples

- do you have a crisis plan ready on your campus? and have you seen and worked through it?
- what about a “course emergency checklist” – if you break your leg, or experience an earthquake?
- U of Southern Mississippi course dev guide/rubric
- UNK online course dev checklist
- U of Alaska Fairbanks course dev/revision checklist
- checklists to support student learning
- U Mass Amherst rubric for student participation

Checklists – challenges?

- Faculty / academic staff skepticism about anything so “simple” having tangible benefits (think of how many defn. of “blended learning” we have).
- Checklists often perceived as limiting independence and creativity.
- Checklists perceived as “beneath” professorial and scholarly processes regarding thought and reflection.
- How many checklists do you need? and how many items do they involve?
- Van Halen and “no brown M&Ms” (Shufeldt, 2010)

Shufeldt (2010) “The Checklist – Part 2” JUCM

Why then, if they are good enough for pilots and big-hair 80s rock bands, has the *medical* profession been one of the last to embrace the use of checklists? Historically, the *medical* profession valued autonomy which is in direct contradistinction to discipline. In medicine today, to overcome necessary fallibility, success now depends on a team of individuals working in concert to provide the best care for the *patient*. Over the years, I have introduced a large number of checklists and standing orders. Here are some of the resultant comments from providers:

- “I did not go to *medical school* to be told how to *practice*.”
- “This is *cookbook medicine*.”
- “These are idiotic, everyone knows this already.”
- “The computer told me what to do.”
- “These standing orders are for morons; I already know all this.”

A multitude of studies have been done in *hospitals* around the world, showing that the use of these “idiotic checklists” saves *lives*, prevents *infections*, alerts the team to *potential etiologies for diseases*, prevents *wrong-side surgery*, etc., etc. Despite our natural inclination toward autonomy and independent thinking, it is clear that the disciplined use of checklists in *medicine* has come of age.

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